

Spring 4-1-2014

Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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no. 27

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SUBMISSIONS

Our reading period extends from July 1 to November 1. Please submit up to 5 pages of poetry (one poem per page) during our reading period via Submittable: <http://columbiapoetry.submittable.com/submit>. The cost of the submission through Submittable is \$3.00.

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We're Okay in the Heartland

We're okay in the heartland.
Some dolls are missing their arms,

but that's to be expected.
We arrange our still lifes on the heavy

linen our grandmothers saved
from the old country. We're obsessed

with birds, although we fumble with their names.
Pleasure comes when they leave in a rush,

or hang together on a thin black wire.
We convince ourselves that all we need

to live on is one fragile ghost and the roaring
circus in our own backyard. We gravitate

towards a warmer palette, damp ground,
and difficult light. Sleep is aided by the sound

of a whistling train in one ear, and a billion
years of ocean tides in the other.

Resolve, Fukushima

Bodies bow even when dead.

Lipping raw fish—there is no water, no heat!

My fists shake—squirrels.

When there are bones—
we do not have time—

So many names to chant, our lips numb—only our lips continue,
singing through numbness, numbing our singing, continue numbing lips, singing.

Some thoughts were wrapped into lunch-boxes.

No package of sweets
I sang—

blue and silver

shelters sea water an antidote for power.

We don't want to see plum blossoms blooming.

We want to feel the threat on our skin
to peel away.

In this village of power he propositions
the bruises on my legs,
didn't feel the shaking

Dead Things

Just like any year
this one is scheduled

to end. Everything
symptomatic of something

else. It's impossible
to be both heartless

and cold-hearted:
like do you ever lie

with someone and think
Someday this body

will only be body?
Like any good ghost,

it's timing.

The Silver World

I want

is a kind of clarity

a way of maintaining
some light lost

of accepting
the most beautiful

world in the rime
the jagged ice a closing

I tell you that I am losing
myself in this dress

I look in you
for spots skidded over

We press our hands
further into the sheets

and I find that *hold you*
means *hold*

against you

I want to live

in this confusion
for a while

Animal Spotting

What kind of stellar motion
I find in you, what plainer voyage
is what I mean when I say I am taking up
some slack in myself. We are only working
models, small forms of the vessel. We live
in a confusion, some selves projected on a screen
where we look alike but act so differently,
like I am always waiting for the moment
when lovers change their minds.
Only yesterday I was kissed on the top
of my head, only yesterday I was baking
lavender cookies and dyeing my hair.
Sometimes whales will leave home mid-song
and return months later to finish it, as if
there had been no interruption.
Dirty water fills up my sink like a lung.
The light isn't so good right now,
but on Sunday we used it to walk us up
through the trees. On Sunday we were far away
thinking of the house and its tiny chisel
and pickaxe, its stray walnuts. I cried
for Joe DiMaggio because sometimes
people aren't in the world any more.
Let's walk to the reservoir today. We can go
to the valley underwater and sing ourselves
right into being. We can find a new tray of marigolds
and think about whales telling each other *hello*
hello hello over a broad range of frequencies.

Easter/Elegy

projective umbra, umbel-
Klavern (—as in *ghost*)
 (with respect to another)
(action's ghost-self summons)

imbricate in the binary
 cur(s)ive, silk- s(l)ender
impresses these inhuman grasses
 excise tax or pathogen

the Body resurrects
on other (bodies) stem
to surface, vestal Wehrmacht
 foam of *speed / clot / bell*

discrete series: Bellflower

left lung envies
yucca: stucco:

shore or glider:

a moon's paper-
weights breath:

conscript surface:

a rib to suckle,
suffer the dark

phantoms
now of oxygen,
sympathetic

pulse: oasis:

bilaterality in-
veighs: against

the sea's slick
fastness, winter's

nape & high-

tech splendor:
small nations

applaud: telluric:

light-bearing:

outside
the mind's strict
phylacteries:

some music
plays, time's

sleeve corrects
as suture:

vacuum: cup:

see, a fossil
emanates:

jewel-flanged:

the working
fringes: we are
not 'original':

a current dries

against the stag's
muscling thigh,

islands elegize—
contain or

braided vesicle:

lift & amity:

against birds:
all flying things:

(even children
hoard their

secret names):

If I Should Tell You

It would surprise us both.

The way your dewy horn sap
would darn my needs—
enough to hitch a comet's
tail to my frozen brain,

once again.

There it is.

To keep from static The way I trail off.

Would you
have guessed misguidance?
My finding the cool side of the bed,
a channel,
trigger shot
out of sight, out of—

This time . . .

What's the matter?

The matter. The mattress.
The kitchen the counter

Or

an overcoat
I'm counting sheets
Between—my jarred eyes
losing you in the crowd.

Every crowd turning humid,
a sheet of steam pushing me
back at him.

Red robe Read: rum
Red throats
Read: hands

Back into a dream. First time I knew
his strangle Invitation
and a warning— ripe smell
of copper
warming
to the early market's spell.

Competition earned, drunk, sweated.
One aggression
waking toward
another. That dread, talking
in my sleep,
and you to hear his name,
a new sound.

That one meeting.
I see his night burnt in every bottle's shadow,
you don't know
this face—
Picture it or can you?

Yours and mine,

then his

and my

choices. More than how,

But why?

How to shake this

hand,

its different heat.

from Extinction Opus

1

The sky creature falls
like a glass elevator. Music

of systole, migrant
and dirty. What you love

limps along. Full of scatology
and old ergopial trash. Glittering

beneath 100 feet of soil
with post-traumatic ropes. It wasn't

recovery, just animals dotted
along the beaches, a grocery

store, a map. Two legs, flaps
that don't matter—that lover

who shoveled begonias, totem
yelled "emergency." Took

everything. Perhaps you stumbled.
Some type of depth. The traps

were stacked like toast, all true.
You flush the flume, sell

books, ask for cash and how
to say, “home.” The sun

squandered on afternoons—
the day lilies crutch along.

3

The doctor is in, says he: "No need
to exhume your body." All laid out like cranial

carnations. Headlines: "You are made
to pay for the dirt—" All pundit, no

gondola. No quiet rocking. A certain
posture of asphalt, grease, we make somnambulism

in parking lots. Those unsweetened, low fat
drifts of consciousness. —Between cities,

a wine called *Hemospherectomy*—I am
all ideas, all font. "Prefer to grow basal ganglia

in pots," says I. He signs for it.

4

A whole garden of it. Split peas,
corpus callosum, she is dying, slow

fog unfolding, limp sky—the signs
all there. Hunched over

opiate moons, blood tests, corns. Those weeds
must replace eggplant, tubes. Scordatura

with hoe, the rake hissing. Discarding pons,
fireflies extinct, raspberries

unbuttoning, pop. We can't quite reckon
the years. The worms go in—a creek, shucked

beans, the soil in so many hues. She hums
the heirloom spuds in rows of three

itsy bitsy plants the rupture deep
beside the treeline. Opens up.

5

Won't let her digest
but some broth soup. Orison

beating like moths
on horizon, mauve burning—

The environment is failing,
she likes to think: reefs. Not colostomy

bags, a tube, but jellyfish who
have taken the bait. The surf

turned off, therefore
nothing. You pat her back,

“Eat up.” Serve clay cups
with fumes. Room No. 422,

IV, adrucil. She opens. A chute,
that heaven

best drunk cold. New Years:
“Go to hell,” you yell, long

when the rest had left
cards, balloons, Pop. Pop.

Marina Tsvetaeva Home Museum

The midnight blue gabardine dress
the yellowed kid gloves

it doesn't matter that I can't decipher
the handwriting on the notebook pages
displayed like antique jewelry in the glass case

will she be conjured out of thin
ordinary air
a bouquet of paper roses

the sleeves hang empty

what is the proper equation: dress plus pen
plus lorgnette

signature plus gloves plus prayer book

pearls plus hairbrush plus postcard

desk plus photograph plus mirror

Robert Kraft, Owner of the New England Patriots, Accuses Vladimir Putin of Stealing His Super Bowl Ring

I've been advised not to ask for its return.

The Department of Defense discourages travel to Russia, even Moscow, now that you support Syria but this is not a game. As you pushed my ring over your knuckle you laughed and said *I could kill a man with this ring*.

Should I have taken this as confession or threat?

Then you unscrewed and pocketed it as though it were the mobile number of some Lithuanian hostess. Your guards corseted themselves around you. And me, only up to their chins. Now you're silent as an orthodox church after the Pussy Riot arrests. When you visited the UN, you didn't even call. If you really thought the ring was a gift surely you'd treat me better than a bus boy or some Bolshevik locked away in a Siberian gulag. It's not about the money.

What's 25,000 to men like us? You were president. Now you're czar. I've seen the photos of you, always shirtless, on horseback, big game hunting with arrow quiver and compound bow, crossing a stream with wide, bivouac smile. We've so much in common. I'm a widower. You're divorced. We love pretty girls dancing in bikinis, tasting sun tan lotion in their sweat. Should I believe the senator who claims no former KGB has soul or my president who saw it in your eyes?

I would have introduced you to Tom and Gisele. Now evidence of my Patriots victory is housed in some Kremlin storage facility, forgotten like the Cold War. I doubt you even wear it.

Three Skies

1. Grievance

Because the sky hides
through self-exposure,

my whole life, it was nothing
but torment to me,

though never could I deny

that what separated me from sky
was only sky.

Now it's noticeably clammy
inside this cloud,

and the sourceless light
sears my vision.

Intermittently,
through the small clefts
that float by,

I behold a world that is,
or is not,

beholding me.

To be the eye in the rift:

I'd always assumed
this was someone
else's work.

2. The Holes in the Wind

The holes in the wind are not indigenous to the wind,
nor may they be reduced to its absence;
they precede the wind and sustain it
as do roots the wilderness.

The holes in the wind are stitched
of ever-smaller holes
through which stillness works its way into the world
in varying harmonic combinations.

The holes in the wind are swarming the universe,
each with its singular mass, spin, and charge,
each finer than granulated diamonds
and brighter than the White Forest,

which is not, as some maintain,
the Black Forest in winter,
but an entirely distinct entity

transposed with the Black Forest
at each upstroke of the sky's one wing.

3. Actual Heaven

Actual Heaven is a sealed
white envelope (too small
to be acknowledged
by the Postal Service)

traveling the world wordlessly,
passed from person to person
at an approximate rate
of one transfer per nano-second.

And that bulky, spangled affectation
we occasionally glimpse
grinding above us—

haven't you heard?
It's merely Decoy Heaven.

The Study of Fire

It's the next imperfect tense: gravity
massaged deep into LEDs, camo
the next skin tone, heat-death of a new god

played in reverse as worship . . . We need to
give everything away into smoke, as
in its worm is where we are most at home,

or, again in the videogame, armed
with the hugest rifle, writing our names
across entire worlds, populations,

the collective memory of having
and the solo perspective of taking
away. I was going to remind us

both. Then you died. I was still creating
poems. Hello, I was still talking about you.

from The Operating Room

(

By far the larger number of operations performed in private are done in the patient's own bedroom. At first it might seem as if this were exposing the patient to an unnecessary risk, but it is by no means necessarily the case. The elaborate arrangements of a large operating theater are designed not so much for the performance of any single operation, as to enable a number of operations to be performed in safety and convenience one after the other.

The essentials of an operating room are in reality very simple. It should be light, warm, and readily cleaned.

)

Tell me something I don't know—
These clumsy hands
the scalpel
the way we cut
across the mattress, across
the platform—

The see saw
the push pull.
That's what it takes—
It's not just the plunge in
but the courage to pull it
out and start again.

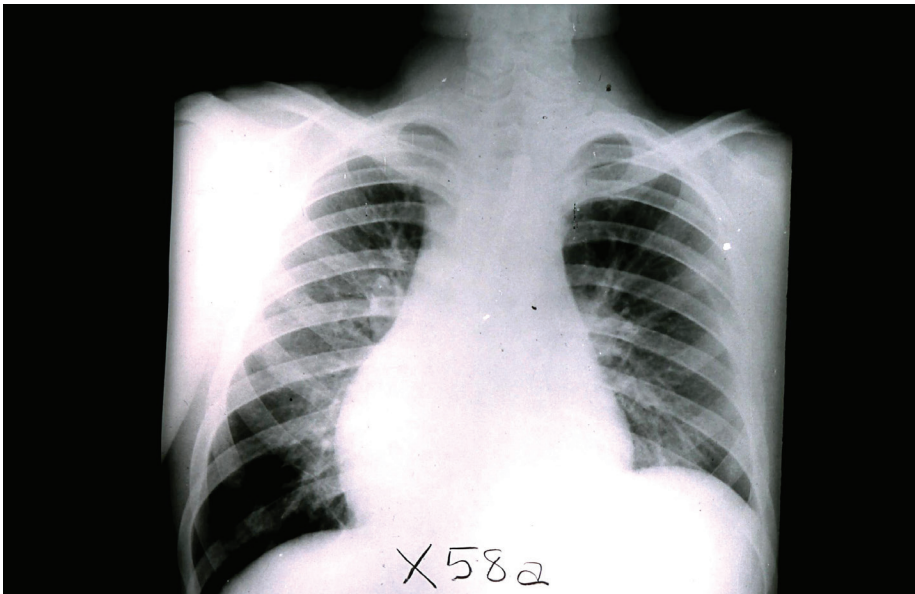
Rest little one—
you might forget.

(

In an ordinary dwelling house, the room should be prepared on the day before the operation, all pictures, furniture, etc., being removed, and should not be disturbed afterwards.

When, however, an operation has to be performed as a matter of urgency, it is important not to disturb anything that is in the room more than is absolutely necessary; the removal of furniture, pictures, or carpets is accompanied by a stirring-up of the dust lying upon them, and in an emergency it is better to leave things of this nature in their original position, and cover over everything with clean sheets.

)



I couldn't from that perspective
tell your chest from
another's
or the center
of your thoughts
from another's.

Here,
I recognize the position of your head.
I recognize
how you might be prone
open—

The Matryoshka Principle

The dolls inside dolls are infinite, but we cannot
prove it—their impossibly dry eyes do not blink any
coherent code nor can we stay awake to endure counting.

Some whispers say that we are like them; some simply
request sunlight, ears, and glue. I nod my chin to my chest
and begin to stroke on the perennial paint, again and again.

These layers are never something new—only something covered
with a fresh veneer that happens to look exactly the same as the old.
The cesarean wounds are always alike and fatal.

We wonder what we are meant to store inside containers exposed so
often to air. The wings of those bugs don't belong here; even the apricots
won't fit—round into round holes.

We know about the wind and why we can't capture it in fractured
wood. We are stacking up, but the empty center remains empty.
Everything here has a desperate sense to keep my body inside itself.

Valentine's Day

We are naked in the bed as servants wheel us through the gardens. In the sun that creases our bodies into shapes like fresh linen, I almost forget the castle exists. *When was the last time we inspected this route?* you ask. I notice the stone stairway, the observation deck.

Years ago I ordered them to prune the valley clean, to leave behind only those trees that happened to grow on the diagonal grid. *To make it all more orderly* my architect said. And I thought the woodsmen would be overjoyed. I thought a new town with new houses for everyone was what they wanted.

Every cut came slow and sad. Soggy logs stuck to the river like bandages offering up their grim salutations. I never told you my trepidations, how in my dreams the cellars went dry and the wine fell out of bottles in red rags. My mistress of improvements, you never saw a wall you could not put a window in,

whereas I am less sure the structure will hold. Last night were you that bright form in the hall? Or at my bedside offering me cheese and small snacks? How long do you think the servants will last at this task, or this drizzle, this start of day, maybe a terrible one, but one I cannot face without your confident purpose.

excavate

i have
found a
level

headed
amer

i can
at the
high est
part of
my bod
y, *slit*

hering
between
each eye
socket

like *film*
and reel.

feeding
off its
own rol
ler arm,

it pro
jects our
god aw
ful his

story
against
the back
wall of
my hol
low skull.

Exiting the Laundromat, I Saw a Man Holding a Bouquet of Flowers—

They reminded me of Valentine's Day, especially
the year Chelsey's mom shot herself. I had ridden

my bicycle across town and was behind an empty club.
The bar leaned, not quite perpendicular to the ground, balcony

barely attached, and the house was surrounded by sirens.
Neighbors gathered on their lawns to watch

paramedics board the ambulance, the city's orange glow
reflecting off what was left of this woman, draped in plastic sheets.

Exeunt Lake & Bird

Everything's more difficult in the rain.
All these magnified pieces of sky distorting
what I see so I can't tell if there's a parade
of ducklings or just some uncollected trash,
those brightly colored containers so empty.
I spend part of my morning unlatching
all of your bras, clean & wet from the machine,
my fingers aroused by the friction as well as
the memory of previous unlatchings
when your breasts were in attendance & not just
their armor. Forgive me if I linger too long
with that steel grey colored one,
with the curvy line patterns, the infinite strings
that scientists say make up the very fabric
of the cosmos. Forgive me, scientists, if I stop
believing your explanations. Outside
my yard turns to mud, which is one thing
the rain makes easier, I guess, so my earlier
findings have been proven invalid. I watch
the puddles increase, I infer a deepening
of the lake I can't see from my window
even though it's a presence I have faith in. I rely
on my exceedingly poor math skills to determine
my actions, i.e. when to return to the laundromat,
how fast I can go in my car & still avoid a ticket.
Sometimes in the trees I see a quick blue flash
& imagine it's either a blue jay or the lake itself
running away. It's been planning an escape for years.

Asking the Machine

I'm in Betsy's house, enormous
behind a wall of trees, but still
I cannot see the water
the GPS screen in my car indicates
should be just over there.
She left me a bowl of oranges,
glistening wet on the counter
& cold from the fridge. She left me
a cat who sleeps on my shirt
spread on one of the many beds
hidden throughout the house.
Nothing here pertains to me.
Hundreds of photographs of people
I don't recognize are jumbled
on one countertop. Who are they?
The last time we talked, Matt said
he's still working on an essay
about noise, a scrivener listening
for the whole song, gathering
new data every day. So, behind
my eyes where my memory is stored,
where my thoughts about other
people reside, my love for my friends,
I see him recording. Here it's quiet.
Betsy's off to work then out
to the Cape to meet up with Darcie
& other real people I don't know.
I push my finger into an orange
with enough force to open it up.
Jenny says, at work, they're feeding

questions into a computer brain—
so good at eating up the raw data—
to find new solutions for the old problem:
how to make our bodies more durable.

Magnitude

My friend's wife has a niece
who's autistic. He doesn't seem
to believe that I never wish
Jesse was different. He talks
about missing the big things
like proms and graduations.
I joke about the perks, not
worrying about Jesse using
nonprescription drugs, driving
drunk on weekends, paying
for college, pretending to like
the woman he wants to marry.
I tell him I take Jesse as he is
and I know what not to expect,
how every new tiny thing
grows in magnitude: the first
time he ran to me, grabbed
my hand when I picked him up
at school, the first morning
he walked into our Brooklyn
bedroom to wake us up,
that one time he scavenged
through his cluttered sensations,
strung four words together
and told me clearly, "Tony
come back August." I explain
I am one of the chosen few
that Jesse invites into his world
and it helps me imagine
I am special with unique super

powers. But yes, I am lying
a bit. I've always wanted to lift
him on my shoulders, six years
old and singing that he believes
in the promised land at a Springsteen
show, play some one-on-one
in a schoolyard, keeping it
close and never letting him win
until he beats me on his own.
And yes, this past weekend
in Maine, I wished he watched
television. We would have sat
and argued when Girardi
benched A-Rod, ate salty snacks
as the Yanks played the Orioles
in the deciding fifth game.
Instead, I sat on a kitchen stool,
listening to the radio broadcast
while Jesse was happy in his room,
alone, tearing pages of picture books
into piles of thin paper strips.

In the dog park a grey hound is politely fucking
a French poodle again should I suffer for admiring
all the beautiful people fashion like Jiminy Cricket
in a top hat and monocle in-and-out of season
a steampunk pack-a-wannabes goes skating by
the coffee barista tells me beauty is in the eyes
of the beholder I tell her she is beautiful and
she asks is this a form of enslavement
how quickly on a train to somewhere

Parkour mi Amor

my racing heart does not touch the ground
which is made of lava and your skinny little attire
deep dark resolutions and
into the house
rustique copper shavings
 from the shaking
chandelier
 a bronze rain
against that tree skin skirt of yours
it's easier to know how to run
so don't follow me from the house
to the yard
 it's burning out here
no wings, no fault, no tomorrow
 that skin of yours
nothing but a reaction

Math Rock Drummer

A man much older, twenty-four to my nineteen,
courted me through letters stuffed with poems

But found me, in flesh,
less compelling.

He was the drummer in a math rock band.

His break up speech wasn't as good as his poem
about Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*,

but better than the one about limura's
postwar cinematic

experimentalism. In real life he talked like a Baltimore
fisherman, not like Eliot.

Or Pound, his hero the anti-Semite.
I knew it would never work

No man could love both me and Pound.

Stand in the sun it's been long
since the sun
hit the synthesizer
through the window
not the harp

taking time to feel
better & always have
a stocking cap in the pocket

we sleep in tents
in summer plant seeds
under the zipper flap

what sprang up
was volume was lush
was sprig

Recital

sky over the gymnasium

clear blue violins

made themselves again

& the party invitation

pictured 4 cakes

sisters remembered

hydrangeas while the storm

felt like vacation

unruliness was welcome

inside chickens

inside children run

bows across

strings & plucking

a semicircle around

Housecat the Fence Beyond

Didn't we
drive outbound

the sky
Midwestern giraffe

boat cloud
particle to shake

Mom gets nervous
sometimes it's true

the decision we
made was good

Form Is the Habitat of Life

When the motion picture camera
accelerates the unfolding of a flower,
we receive a sublime image of offering.

Large things can issue from small ones.
The forces of egress are such, the most
dynamic escapes. Shells are

nests from which birds have flown.
Here we have a confusion of genres.
Often when we think we are describing,

we merely imagine. Certain theories
that were once thought to be scientific
are, in reality, vast boundless daydreams.

Life's principal effort is to make shells.
At the center there was a vast dream of shells.
Inside a man's body is an assemblage of shells.

In the same way there are ambush-houses,
there are trap-shells. There's no need
of a gate, no need of an iron-trimmed door.

For the famished wolf, it is now nothing
but a stone on the road. Amazement
of this kind is rarely felt twice.

Wolves in shells are crueler than stray ones.
Thus a learned daydream collects
legendary hyphens. The russet cuckoo is

simply the grey cuckoo when it is young.
By solving small problems we teach ourselves
to solve large ones. A man, an animal,

an almond—all find maximum repose in a shell.
Place them under the magnifying glass.
We want to see and yet we are afraid to see.

These daydreams are at once long
and brief. We know perfectly well that
to inhabit a shell, we must be alone.

How Old Are You?

Some Mondays I unstack old bills, look for signs.
I don't care what sports team wins. Since I started
playing Scrabble, words make less sense. Which makes
me wish for the old days, even if that means
I'm old. If this were the '80s, I'd be stamping letters
or kissing in ways I've forgotten. I'm still impossibly
romantic. I watch young women's asses roam their ways
to parked cars as they look at tiny screens. Buildings
may explode. I still make goofy faces at cameras though
I know how to make my face look thin. Chin out, head down.

Which reminds me:

The same greenhouse gas that destroys the ozone
helps produce erections. Is this why I keep forgetting
my reusable grocery bags? In the past decade, I've learned
to comb my mother's hair, cut her fingernails. She says, *Ow!*
Ow. If I could give her my brain. If I could get my own daughter
to say what she thinks. Long ago, my grandmother crossed
the ocean with a stranger's baby. As the ship was leaving,
a woman said *Can you hold him for a second, please?*
Then walked away. Sometimes what happens in outer space
is less puzzling than what happened yesterday.

Where Are You From?

A row of houses made from communion wafers.
When it rained, reverence turned soggy. It was
kind of funny—stiff-haired ladies thinking about saliva
in their mouths making more saliva even though
no one wanted to. Sometimes the air smelled like mints
scattered in the bottom of a purse. Sometimes like onions.
Once a neighbor bent down to touch my cheek and her mouth
was a cedar chest, darkly sweet.

We all had secrets

and I wanted to find them. When the wind blew through
trees, some of us heard prayers. One mentioned Art—
Our father who art in heaven—and I got excited.
Once a man showed me a Jasper Johns painting.
Why paint a flag? I said. Then *Oh*. In small towns in Ohio,
Oh is a native tongue, a birthright to not know then
to know. In the same prayer I heard the word *hollow*,
and though my stiff-haired aunt corrected me—*hallowed*,
she said, *what we revere*—its echoes never went away.

What Do You Like About America?

You know how the tip of a soft serve cone curls like an unanswered question? I like that. I like how TV shows are all sexual innuendo unless they're just pure sex, and how politicians become lexicographers when they redefine rape; Paleolithic time travelers when they want to ban birth control. I like all the different kinds of milk—almond, hemp, soy, breast, rice, goat, one percent, two. I like answers sure as pool cues. I like how our brains have free range of motion, how sometimes we forget. I like the lack of soldiers in the streets and police on bikes. Pat your right pants pocket, touch a gun. In rich neighborhoods there's an epidemic of brown-skinned landscapers whirling leaf blowers in the wind. I like America's rhetorical questions and making sense. I like how I can't believe I don't have more African American friends. I like our dinosaur bones, generic drugs, feeling safe in neon colors. Buy One Get One Free. I like free. I like American cheese made from petroleum and American gas made from wars. I like being an elbow in the world's conscience. Guns in glove compartments, guns in drawers. I like how rich women are boney thin. I like having electricity all the time and how we fall in love in the ether. I like American furniture that swaddles us into babies again. I like shallots, slumlords, sinkers and signet rings. I like running from nothing wearing shoes made in China. I like crunchy things in bags, oil in spray cans, and how we eat, eat, eat until we're unsatisfied and full.

from The Haint Is Riding You

Can I interest you in a shitty walnut tree I carry around everywhere? The walnuts are worm inclusive. I can't remember branches.

In Icelandic folklore a ghost woman crawls into the sleeping body to compare her ghost parts to regular ones.

I forgot to mention the hallucinations.

There was never a nest.

There were only two kinds of genitals, until today.

The amygdala is an oyster flavored mechanism.

People who experience sleep paralysis generally believe in evil. A church raised one million dollars to tear itself down.

What you don't realize is that love is a threat.

For someone that doesn't believe in God I sure love Christian marketing.

The paralyzed are struck with a deep sense of terror.

Intruder hallucination: most homeless people are my mother.

I want to kiss you for good luck. I never want to close.

I don't have a problem admitting I was once tested to see if I was sexually attracted to children. The test came back negative.

One of the ways to get free is to stop breathing.

Look at them flick eyes.

Friend, listen. The haint is riding you.

The voice of a cat across the room, as ridiculous as a human baby, unyielding meow, endless craggy yelp, for several dozen minutes.

Practice repetitive thinking, chanting, or breathing. Breathing may not be possible.

Any invasive species can be destroyed if you have enough muscle and enough time.

Fact: you will never have the ultimate man cave. Fact: you are being eaten alive.

Jello Pig

Now you are in the woods. A particular, familiar woods you knew as a kid. The trees have been undressing for a month and the light is right. Now the smell of a distant bonfire. Yellow predominates the litterfall, accented by orange and scorched brown. Now there is no wind. Now picture a cherry Jello pig walking toward you through trees. Listen to its Jello hooves crunch leaves. Listen to its fatness slosh. Now everything about your clothes, your history, your name, your friends, your body and its smells, your parents and your bearings and these woods is exceedingly familiar. But now there is a red Jello pig walking toward you and you do not know its intentions. There is a cherry Jello pig that, like a number, both exists and does not exist as an independent object in the woods, which is the known world. Now in a panic, you begin to count trees. Any, any, pig. There is a red Jello pig several feet from you, and you, you have decisions to make.

Careful, I Just Won a Prize at the Fair

Don't remind me
how insufficient
love is. You

threw quarters
into a bowl. We are bones
and need, all hair

and want: this fish won't swim
in a plastic bag
forever. My makeshift

gown is a candle, my breasts
full of milk for our young—
whose flames

are these anyway?

Air Show

When he wanders off
you know the sky will send some
tendrils to him, each
of the white skeins of planes
ribboning through as perfect
as a space of deliverance. Which
world offers the magomancy
of a word like *child-rearing*? Late July,
Osh Kosh, Wisconsin, a place you
have never been, he is three, his body
a tintinnabulation: he wants
your hand in his, he suffers
your botched love, your welded fuel
tank, your ancient wingspan. *Go'n*
and climb the steps, you want to say, so far
north these sounds plait like silver, *Darlin'*,
put your palm to the sheen of war—its booby
lady, its swaths of green, called—can you
say, *camouflage*? *Go'n*, honey, we're each
pilots of our own making.
No, none of that can come
from the mouth (alone). You sing
a *ranz-des-vaches*, the ramentum of wanting
so much. To keep him from, or from
him, this son, this small nebula, you can
nearly hear it now, having fallen
from you: what does *fucked-up*
mean? *Mama*,
he cries, unseen, some man
piaffing in mustache and helmet,

offering, indeed, a hand up into his craft, *Mama*,
he screams, and this will be what comes
of walking the earth, the daring
blue above another schema
of all that is careening,
lovely, unsung: I can't know
where I am.

This Is Not an Entrance

A tall tall man walking through the mist away from you.
The mist is rising up from a wound—the shape of a man
hole—you can't find but feel. A face in the family album
you haven't opened in years. Its single frame per century.
It doesn't blink but opens wider and wider into the white.
This figure minus its features. Your figure
like the split in a lizard's tongue; that same kind
of wet empty in-between, the same kind
of slow methodical quiver, in and out and in:
a stripped apology you keep making to yourself
in a mirror your mother used to hang in a narrow hallway
you could barely fit your way through to the front door;
a "sorry" you keep close and ready like a gun
you've bought in another language. All it takes
is a nod and some money. And you,
you are new and tasteless like an order
you have learned to place without knowing
the origin, or remembering where and what
your mother's supper table so far away.

You try and say yes, from out of the eight ball's
black milk, but it never quite works. Something

about a firing mechanism. Your foreign body
rejecting the host, which means a bad fit.

Which means this pathogen isn't built for two.

Which means it's something still in your blood.

Body Fiction

A light so bright it cooled the room.
All screaming about animals and rain.
My body. As though it wanted to be
away from any system, including
itself. It's hard to read in the shadow,
to see what I want compared to what
is true. *Healthier* is a seriously strong
word. Why does it sting? A simple
thought, brain bowed to imagination.
I take a break from myself. Hunger
for money, many making movements
beyond hunger . . . you've heard this
before, so much pride ends up in
prayer. Watch out, if it aims, my heart
becomes a stressed dagger or dart.
Not so much dangerous as determined.
It's like a stalker who will stop at
the victim's request. Do I go too far
with this? And that's not everything.
Animals and rain. My body, it stings.

Animal Tree

first dog's grave stone-marked
next to the birch
second dog still has a chewing problem
thinks he's human or we're both dogs
I haven't decided yet
but I'd like to tell you
my father is dead
and Eddie takes care of my mother now

my sleep cycles have returned to normal
last night didn't feel like a nightmare
it was one of those third-person dreams
two dogs and I pawed at the side door
tongues unraveled
whining with a strange lack of feeling
and that's all
just waited for someone to answer
not much mystery to the dream:
I miss my dead father

this was months ago
Eddie moved the dog's gravestones
ten years in the same spot
but he didn't know the animal
I went for a walk and saw them gone
a long time I grieved for the dog
such a kind animal
little boys forget lots of things
found eight stones the right size
placed them in a circle by the birch

The Thing with Feathers

This is for you.
It's not really just an apple.
I was lonely yesterday afternoon
and went to the grocery store
across the neighborhood
where the people with families
shop. I found it at the bottom
of the crate while making
a mountain of the other apples
looking for my favorite.
This one is especially shiny.
It reminds me
of your bald spot,
how rubbing it at bedtime
would bring me good luck.
Grandpa taught you
this superstition.
The cashier asked
if there was anything else
and I handed her
fifty-three cents.
I came home
and washed the apple
for you. Here it is
waiting by the sink.
Please come back to get it
whenever you can.

Fumigating the Apartment

Heard souls are vestigial. Been dreaming in poems. No solace, pest.
Itchy, y'all. Burn the mattress. You are insanitary. Sick in the bed.

Symptoms include creativity, a soulectomy's recommended.
Sometimes I do cretin activity like falling in love with the ceiling

fan, glue it to my hip, always thought the clouds would taste
like cotton candy. Two kinds of people in this world: helicopters.

No hovering before surgery. Maybe the doctor will let you
take it home in a jar. Don't think of it as empty, think full

of nothing. Millions live every day without knowing the meaning
of posterity. Yins live the mill every day. This is Pittsburgh

for blue collar. Government can't afford that many dictionaries.
Press release: Many got a soulectomy, and he turned out fine.

Do some. Some do. Stand on the street gape-mouthed collecting
precipitation during the rainy months. Do. View the migrating part of men.

Constitutional Remedy

I was lying in bed with the husband and he stroked my hair back and asked how I was and I said, “I am feeling a little ummmh because the world has a contagious disease and I have it too” and he said, “A uhh what kind of disease?” and I said “an edge of winter mmmhgh” and he fell asleep and I was alone with the infection then.

It was the night my hair was so dirty but not as dirty as her hair was the day when after five days in my birthing room she left and went out into the world and got her hair cut half-asleep and went back to her family whom I had forgotten existed.

Birthing is a very egocentric trip. Women make human beings like God did and that’s also why men hate us because we are really at the ground level.

The whole world I tell you has a sickness, a quick sickness, an end of days sickness, a carpal tunnel sickness, an attention deficit sickness, a bee allergy, a peanut allergy, a canary with a coal lung, a toxin, an accident, post-traumatic, pre-traumatic, psychosomatic, avian flu epidemic while I lie here alone in bed in the house of my family with my dirty hair.

Something is seriously wrong with the water.

My tongue just swelled up when I said that.

I was in the shower and in the shower the hot shower with all the pain knotted behind my shoulder blade and I thought of all the chlorine and all the terrible mothers and the water went down the drain with the Paxil-filled piss and the Advil-filled piss and the Ambien-filled piss—the numb and the deadened and the sleep piss—and that is called run-off. Called grey water.

Have you noticed how all these people have reduced motility of their necks and can’t turn their heads around? It’s been happening to me too. The zombie car-wreck syndrome. I can’t look to the left anymore.

Also infertility which I've written a thing or two about.

Also the mix-up of libido and survival of the fittest which I'm looking into.

My blood is like a streak of gas my sex is like a streak of egg my egg is like a streak of blood. My urge is like a collar. My desire comes and goes but at this edge of winter is mostly out like a light.

The husband sleeps on. The hair is very dirty and causes an insomnia. But if I lie very still and dream about summer my daughter says it will come. And I will jump for joy she says. If I dream about the zoo and a swimming pool. If I am not sick and lie so still.

How is your family? And what is their constitutional remedy?

Give me a perfect white pellet tastes like sugar made of the smallest possible fraction of the largest possible predicament.

I'm Not Saying *Your* Mother Is a Vampire

Dear Wayne—

It has recently come to my attention that your mother and my mother are living in the same town with its sunny name that always makes me think of Buffy and the hellmouth town in California where she and those vampires all live.

My mother and your mother live in a hellmouth of vampyres in Northern California, among the plastics and the plastiques doncha know.

My mother at least is not so sunny as her town name implies. Yours?

My mother and your mother were hang.ing.up.their.clothes.

Your mother works in gender at Stanford.

My mother works in gender at Stanford, too:

her work is lying back while they take out tiny pieces of her body, which is a woman's body, and put them in a jar, then blast her woman's body with chemicals to keep it preserved.

So far it's working. Some might say *too well*.

Maybe your mother would like to go to that department of Stanford and have a peek?

My mother has an illusion she is really at the center of The Struggle and I'm sure would tell your mother a thing or two even though your mother comes by it all honestly and mine does not.

That's the way she is, my mother.

If my mother met your mother she would probably piss her off.

My mother punched your mother right.in.the.nose.

My mother never socked me but we nevertheless have not spoken for three years one month and thirty days and I don't know if we will again before she finally dies even though she has yet to die even though she is someone you could legitimately say is "dying."

It's frankly a little creepy.

What.co.lor.is.her.blood?

I don't know: I'm in Chicago, far from all that,
and you're in New York, Wayne,
and there are our mothers in Northern California
full of blood that rightfully belongs to us.
I'm just speaking for myself here.

Poem (For Myself)

This is a song set to the beat
of when my MRI machine

was thumping in time with your MRI machine.
This is the realization we had

when we were walking down the street
talking in the way we never let ourselves call arguing

and overheard the radio from the truck
with the rolled-down windows

booming out the sound of us talking
in the way we never let ourselves call arguing.

The sky can't make up its mind
whether or not you are part of this

fog I'm always shrugging off
and in the distance snow is melting

as it hits Lake Michigan,
which is a kind of I'm sorry

I'm letting myself have.

St. John the Baptist

Started screaming yesterday. Screamed for hours straight. Don't mean cried. Screamed. Just let out a huge, solid, ragged wall of voice. Had to stop when I ran out of voice. Blood in my mouth. Hospital. Got a pad of paper for communicating. Wife said why did you do this I love you. Wrote this isn't about love. This is about screaming.

Today I kept scribbling until the paper tore. Ruined four pens. The psychiatrist asked me what I am trying to express. I am trying to express what is inside me. Inside me is scribble.

Went home after. Been making escape plans. Tunnels. Dug a hole in my chest. Should have started in some dirt. More hospital. Screaming. Scribble.

My toilet is the river jordan. Wife is screaming where is my grandmother's rosary. Broken window. Dead dove.

Wrote words today. Wrote down applesauce and showed it to an apple. Wrote headlessness and showed it to everyone.

Found a bug. Wrote eat you and showed it to him. Remembered bugs don't read. Ate him.

Can't find things. Wanted to write dark but can't find hands. Can't find hands. Can't find wife.

The Birthday Cake I Made You

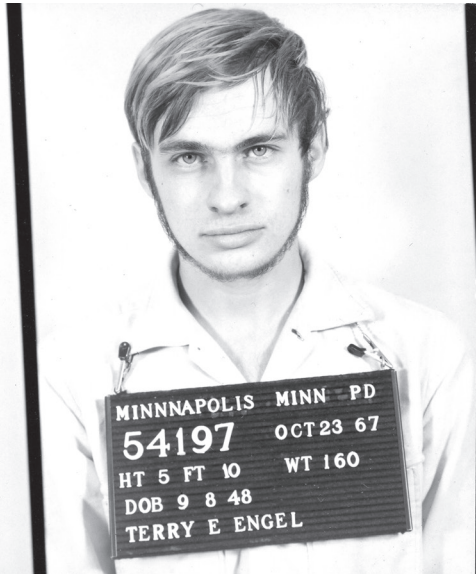
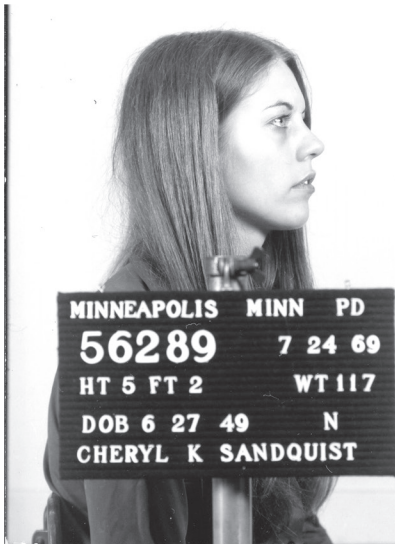
Today I made you a birthday cake with yellow frosting. On top of the birthday cake I wrote Happy birthday and then crossed it out, thinking it was too obvious. Next I wrote Dearest love and then crossed that out. I tried a couple more things out, including Your hair is a breath of flowers and Hello hello boom boom boom hey hey and a poor attempt at drawing a portrait of your favorite singer, with all his curly locks. I crossed out all of these and began writing an account of how I met you, and how my feelings for you have swelled since. I crossed this out and wrote a story about two birds who shared certain organs, which was maybe even more obvious than Happy birthday. At this point I trashed the cake and made a bigger cake, one with plenty of room for anything I could think of to write on it. I drew a dragon and had him saying something about your elbows. Next to the dragon I drew a strong man whose mother was on fire. She wasn't pictured but you could see it in his eyes. You could tell this man got his strength from his mother's ability to endure being slowly burned alive the entire time she raised him. You could see the silent hurt from how many times he had tried to put out her fire, and how each time had failed. How he had taken her swimming and wept when the whole pool had simply sizzled up into the clouds, and the look of gratitude she gave him for his efforts. What a man, I imagined you thinking when you saw this cake. I drew his arm held out to you in a way that said, I am here for you in your darkest times, while still being fully self-sufficient through this inner strength I have, and therefore you do not need to worry about me, because through my strength I can take care of myself and you as well, and I will show your own inner strength and admire you fully for it.

Found Photographs

from the collection of Gillian McCain

















When I Am 12 and Jeremy Is 11, We Find a Dead Deer by the Railroad Tracks

I wait behind on the road and survey the carcass while Jeremy crawls through the gravel to find a suitable stick in the woods.

For several long minutes there is curious autopsy: flesh wound, blood pool, eye loosed from socket.

Then it's stick under leg, stick propping up bone, stick letting hard hoof thunk solid on ground.

Across town my parents visit their first respective lawyers. Meanwhile, Jeremy and I listen to cassette tapes in his boom box; Jeremy and I dismantle and re-mantle a carburetor; Jeremy and I hide bottles in holes on his parents' spotty lawn.

When it's evening, Jeremy's mother sets up the computer in the living room, and we excitedly click buttons, listen to the pops and beeps of phone cords filling up with pictures from places we've never seen.

It will be years before the cops come and go with hard drive, before there's only one story we tell about Jeremy.

I will always want to tell someone how I pulled Jeremy back home, away from body, how I always knew he couldn't leave a defenseless thing alone.

ff

No sweeter ligature
and much preferred to
the knotted silk rope in
a brocade box, a mes-
sage from the emperor
that you should hang
your miscreant in-
sufflating gaijin self,
nothing you say will
lift his edict, his heart
a fjord, a fist, your
curriculum no longer
vitæ, your œuvre is
shit. Serious stuff.

The Cake

Where would you like to be?
A little closer to the window, please.
And the soul of my mother spake, saying
You should have spoken sooner.
And I heard my father's soul say
You should have listened to me.
Then I was wheeled to the window
And I saw the mist over the grass
Of all words, my mistakes carefully
Wrapped in a blanket and sung to.
On the corner there was a bakery.
A cake sat in the window,
Waiting for the world to wake up.

The Dramatic Story of the Former Hostage in Her Own Words

What does it mean
to fully inhabit
a nutshell?
It means to
self-crack
from within
like a chick
(I was referring to myself
just then I mean now
for I am still within,
nutmeat as it were
I mean as it is I am
& can no further expand
I mean expound
there is no longer any
room to expound in
& I fully understand
what it means to
inhabit a nutshell,
I am bound to)

Sequoia

I keep some moss in a bowl
tiny unreal deer there
looking out over the hills
for some water

at the black glass lake
alone at the edge
I stand shaking myself out
didn't think to bring a towel

Sent to the Monk

Night falls
and the empty intimacy of the whole world
fills my heart to frothing.
The past has trudged to this one spot
and falls into the stream,
its flashlight in its mouth.
Ancient tears beneath the surface
rise and scatter like carp,
while an ivory hairpin floats away
like a loose tooth going back in time.

Dark Corner

I was cleaning an empty drawer
I wanted to put things in.
Not much there—
a dead fly, a dark penny,
a straight pin, dust
in the back corners.
As I crimped my fingers
to pick up the pin
a poem came to me.
That is, it appeared
word for word in my mind.
How did it get in the drawer?
How long had it waited?
Had I put it there,
in holding?
Did it belong to the *fly*?
Did he drop it from some lonely height
onto this playground of refuse,
his own death
come out of nowhere?

Évadné

translated by Teresa McMahon

We were one person that summer and all in one
piece the freshness and the fragrance of the countryside
consumed the colors of your skirt; between our
eagerness and restraint we struck a balance
the walls of Maubec Castle were sinking in soft clay
before long the lyres out rolling would collapse
in the violent overgrowth we felt a quiver
a murky raven rower veering from its fleet
upon a mute silex at quarter to high noon
accompanied us with tender acknowledged movements
the blade of the sickle must have been at rest
everywhere our rarity began to reign
(insomniac winds wrinkled our eyelids
each night allowed us to turn new pages
a share of you I hold on to, a starving age
during which cornices alone could trap tears)

This was the beginning of our ardent years
The earth loved us a little then, I remember

Rehoboam

A mutton dash—A mutton dash.
We are together and we are figuring, dining with
unearned cash, allocate appetizer, song to arriver.
You see the weather wherein its losses
breeze jubilant, stones mock the paths,
calculating erratic futures. Your eyes venture in their
million qualities. Typed up via sightline O beeline of
will-shot will, a wave-total is tree-lined,
skeptical angel, smear me. Buckle-drunk, I want you
to welt me. Taken, into a new thing, we are in clover.
Bend us radials metallic, hoop to glory,
embodying our constellate-illiterate embrace, love,
I work your drum as mine until our flam abstracts
all coordinates into the pointillist's demon erasure.
Time gets us around us, a couple of real waves, yea.
For our wiling, I've built the colophon,
flame, wore us to ribbon, its flowers tied us up.
Drugs of composure, recline us. The sea goads
the headsul you arch me for. Sunspots embolden hunt
a day's nail. Jangling sloops aren't us aren't even like
we fuck, prodigal. There are so many kinds of.
A mutton dash—A mutton dash. The poets rebuke
any code, absolve out of their sheaf just to
feel flanked, and inflect their sexuation, asking bright
fog, a figure, whether we are amateurs of one another.

A Brief History of Sex

Cold gleam reticulated
blindly & so scurried

to unlove the trusted
animals—

To stay still in
a wood known for

its teeth & wet ice.
It's coming down to

a method spun backwards
yet to study, discern the

moment before
the moment

wet like a cut opened
on a man's face

by another man's
dream.

A Brief History of the Coxswain

The cut's a spoil & sunk
to here again undaunted
flies undo the torch's glow
as if the children's
chorus wanted out
to clocking, bladed rowing now.

So cross, so plain
to see you shy
to hold & wonder
who could row to here
to spider over now
or under you
as well to carry
each to each
& off.

A Brief History of the Stranger

Slow to collapse if told by
a hand to smear over

a bland edge of rain
a conceit to swear

the wings off with
wind. None

come through
those impugned.

Come through with your
hands on fire.

I get the music's touchy
slough—the hills inoculating

whosoever comes into
the ices & itch, malevolent

trader speaking rashly
with a nice smile.

He said *I tell people you're my real daughter*

He said *I'll paint your name on a bomb next to
an American flag, so when they die, they'll know
who won. He said in war, sometimes these things are
necessary. They'll happen anyway so we might as well watch.*

He said *I like the way you look
at yourself when you put on makeup. Touch
your cheek again. He said it was the war, it was my
childhood that made me do it. He said it was a victimless crime,
it would have happened anyway. He said you know I never really
touched you even though you always rolled your shorts at the waistband
when you were young. He said your mom was so young
when we met. Your body looks just like hers
once did. She was so stunning before
the baby weight.*

Young American Actress

Stay calm, Hans said,
This is simply the beginning.

Stay calm, the bomb said,
This is the beginning.

The beginning just said,
This is not your favorite ending.

Keep your pants on
This hasn't even begun yet

Yo, stay calm,
He's killed one terrorist.

But there're like 12 more.
All we know is 30 hostages

Peeing in the koi pond.
Die Hard said the beginning

Is nothin compared
To the middle.

Aiyo, we call that
transference.

from Green

06.07.13, Cleveland, OH: 9:40AM

A death zone exists once climbers cross a certain altitude while ascending Mount Everest an elevation where anything that needs oxygen cannot grow. Climbers will note the last blade of grass upon ascent & the first blade of grass upon descent in order to gauge just how close to death they happen to be.

If a cinematographer uses infrared film while shooting a movie everything containing heat will be saturated w/ a certain amount of redness depending on its energy signature transforming organic matter into a cotton candy landscape that will aestheticize the most brutal of genocides.

The beauty of a long poem is that there is no pressure to consolidate the universe w/in a few lines words can unfold in time & mind only their business of breathing phonemes.

An abstraction here an observation here or whatever.

The Internet is now our archive an electronic library storing all of human history. The Wayback Machine accumulates everything on the Net but being infinite this is impossible.

Access drives preservation. Dark archives are the worst possible idea.

Here is a line about stars.

Here is a line about flowers.

06.09.13, I-80/90E eastern Indiana: 11:56AM

It's not leaving that worries me so much as returning.

& I wonder what Lorca thought as a poet in NYC both upon his arrival & at his departure. What did Spain mean to him before during & after The Crash?

Urban capitalism at its finest can be isolating & empty but also a boon for anyone w/ \$\$\$.

Whenever someone reads about the failure of the Stock Market there will always be an anecdote about a broker whose faith in capital has been so shaken & there being nothing else he's invested himself in psychically that he jumps off the ledge of a skyscraper. Now it's become cliché to leap to one's death at the moment of financial ruin.

On 11 September 2001 having nowhere else to go & not wanting to be consumed by fire or die from inhalation body after body hurled themselves out the windows of the World Trade Center's twin towers as I listened to Dan Rather's play-by-play on CBS Radio while I shelved textbooks in the DuBois Book Store's warehouse in Oxford, OH. Moments later the towers fell one after the other & the only thing I can remember is the impression of Rather's voice halting awed & forlorn.

There are pictures of three early editions of Lorca's *Poet in New York* on my phone taken in the lobby of a CUNY building for a display honoring the deceased poet's brief tenure at Columbia University for a series of lectures he delivered while living in the city. I haven't read the book which isn't just a problem w/ me but w/ an entire generation which isn't really a problem at all merely a way of living in the world that does not consist of Lorca.

For every one Lorca there are a million more Lorcass.

I'm not one to make totalizing claims but for the sake of straw men I will say this we are both too much & too little w/ the world in a way that more than matters but I cannot understand how either way affects me anymore than I can understand how it affects you.

There are hawks & pigeons nesting in the heights of every NYC high-rise.

There are poets everywhere writing themselves into obscurity.

The Smallest Room

1

I read a lot of poetry on the toilet.
It's a good place

for perusing the universe
though no one wants to admit to

the amount of crying accomplished
in a bathroom stall at work.

Sometimes I like to bring in magnets or tape
and hang my poems on the walls.

They look like little TV monitors
that work in reverse.

I look like a security guard
who knows this.

2

I live alone. I shut the door
in case I don't.

A cockroach in the tub
excuses itself.

I do a puzzle.

Think about gorillas.

The size of their hands
tugging at a roll of thin paper.

No way am I going to die
doing something important.

3

There seems to be a lot of disagreement
about what constitutes Going Number Three.

Are you putting on makeup at the same time?
Are you ordering Chinese?

Are you piloting a tiny helicopter?
Are you even in there?

The Numbers One Through Ten

1

Everyone comes to One for advice, she's been around the longest. You can always find her working on some science project or another.

2

Two is friends with One, but considered more beautiful.

3

Three loves to cook and yo-yo. Believed to be related distantly to Four (though no one knows how), he is rarely seen without her.

4

Four is very well-mannered. She does her homework on time and volunteers at the local shelter. She owns a horse.

5

Five is a real athlete, despite not being very bright. After school, Four tutors him at the public library.

6

Six is a nice enough guy, but no one seems to know anything about him.

7

Seven is dating Eight. He doesn't like any other numbers. He chews on toothpicks constantly and thinks old pocketwatches are cool.

8

Eight is a little snooty. She maintains a friendship with Four that she keeps secret from Seven.

9

Nine wears suits and smokes a pipe. He has a crush on Eight.

10

Ten is the patriarch for some reason. He values Nine and One's counsel greatly.

The Reunion Mood

And in the face of everything, you do
the research so long you forget to turn
the light on when the living room gets dark.
When I was a kid I'd be up late with
words, something really, really good in the
radio glow, the hazards of knowing
there's no boon in being here, no glamour
to be had riding on the sliding plates.
Hey man, it's been a while, and I've been
spending the day indexing what I've lost.
Earlier I was describing, homesick,
the wound-up something I swallow when I
think about what's gone forever, about
what's here. It's all we have: staying up late.

Dear X,

my kitchen can't sing or do a cartwheel

it mourns a carnival

then, the sun came out and thought

how nice to see you more than that,

the whole day through

moon and pine

the balloons in the center of town

are almost in lines but of course like this tethered they cannot

rise bread rise water rise

also, the empty truck bed can't be left alone all the time

it's best

to drive it to you at night,

ran into your mom outside that store that sells curtains

she told me you're living in the city

ran into a girl from ballet in Germany

she said the neon
is still stuck behind her bed

silly putty

in Israel saw Julia
 we couldn't believe

one another.

Comfort

In the morning, it is dark when I turn on the water. By the end of my shower, garbage men are outside. Shouting to each other. They talk of gathering. Sending parts of a feast to the edge of town. Rot, it's all piled on top of each other. Forgetting, forgetting its taste and its color.

I'm concerned that lasting comfort arrives after an ache.

I'm concerned that lasting comfort arrives after some process of dulling.

Part of me goes on a walk and part of me stays at home. The part that goes out is calmed. There isn't much sun in the apartment and the patches of it come on at strange times. Inconvenient. Activities like eating and listening do not need sunlight. Reading on the couch certainly does. Same with looking for one's keys.

Part of me sees you everywhere. The part that doesn't is in denial. Looking down as unknowns pass by in their ugly shoes. The slippers in *The Wizard of Oz*. Not the part where Judy Garland gets them, but the bad witch, her stockings, trapped under the house. Dorothy, don't you understand? Sometimes I want gin and something with butter. This door belongs to a sweet little house. The sweet little house has a cherry tree. Obscene. The nerve of various fruit.

Next to the house, berries are growing. They are unidentifiable and I know so little about poison. The decision not to eat them feels like giving up.

Candy Wrappers

Tree -

top

holds

the frame

of one

empty window.

Bet sadly that

the neighbors

and their root beer parties

did this

as a joke. Why

else hang

a thing,

useful thing

whose job is
to let us look?

Does it make them feel better,
like throwing candy wrappers
out the window in a town you hate?

Very Large Cardboard Box

In third grade Bobby N. spent an afternoon
in a box—the teacher brought it from home
just to put him in; she'd bought a new fridge—
without a pencil, since he'd have poked holes
in it. Relax. This was in a Catholic school
in the '80s in St. Louis where worse things
happened to the poor kids in the public schools
every day. This one is almost that big,
but look at me carrying it. I am carrying it
so I will know it is not a metaphor and only
a cardboard box that held a big machine.
I am the popcorn heiress and my father
has sent me a popcorn machine. He is careful
to love me; look how he sends me boxes
with which many someones have been told
to be careful: the guys in the box factory,
the guys in the popcorn machine factory,
the guys with the truck. There are unluckier
boxes, boxes which are not corrugated,
boxes no one is careful with: in them glasses
shatter and animal statues your GiGi made
crack. Movers are always so careless although
you are often the one who was careless
and didn't buy bubble wrap, but you can paste
lots of things back together. You learn how
to do it in third grade. In third grade I learned
how to diagram sentences; if you look
at the records I was good at it which is why
I am an English professor on the tenure-track.
My department will enjoy this popcorn machine

and I will enjoy my very large cardboard box
that is not a metaphor, although it is empty.
I know what you want to do with emptiness:
fill it with lilacs or kittens or poets thinking
things that are beautiful happening inside.
Look at them. Are they not useless for storage?
Plenty of little? Kind of unsturdy? This box
I am carrying will be so good at taking up
space in the garage; it could hold onto anything
in the world where many boxes can not
because they are not corrugated because
no one taught them to be careful with us.

Glass Box

1

Today, I think *I can do this for you; I can make this box for you.*

I don khakis, the attire of the religious order.

The workers valued revelation and the gospel which means

“good news” in Old English. Spilled Frappuccino on pants, cried

“Oh no! Oh shit!” Then went down the soldiers of 33rd Punjabis of the British Indian Army in khaki. I don the depicted details, the place where one

must implant some cultural memory. I am the third
remove, unheard, unheeded so today I think I can blow a glass

box for you and call it a cube. She said maybe you’re in love
with your friend and I said I think I can do this for you.

2

I loved my friend but he loved someone else and I was very pregnant
with another man’s baby. The early martyrs watched the fires
set by the emperor’s own agents. I was teaching

Humanities again. My friend flew across the country
to visit his lover. I had to breastfeed, commute, buy gallon

after gallon of milk. Read: this is just the diary of
an ordinary woman or “mom” living at the beginning of the 21st
century. Dura-Europas, the small garrison town is really a
cubicle and you are typing a poem by Hopkins into the screen
of the 21st century. When you see hours, you mean years.

3

When my friend told me he was in love with someone else,
my thoughts turned to Graeco-Roman models
for inspiration. Also, the letdown
of milk since the body is relentless. A troll on Twitter.
It was snowing on all the arches, on the atrium, the four
chambers of a chicken's short-lived, factory-style heart.

The word "psalm" comes from the Greek word "to pluck
a lyre." Maybe I can address you now. My husband
will be furious. Coward. Liar. A voice says, "Sandra, why did
you have another baby?" Exercises: reread the Ten

4

Commandments (Exodus 20). *Could you suggest other
commandments for inclusion in a modern version?*
Day went down. I wrote a love poem.

Then monotheism, belief in ethics, a covenant
with god, and the bible's influence. I throw my bills,
unopened, into the recycling bin. The workers
and the rise of universities. A friend tweeted endlessly
about boners and blowjobs. I bought her book.
My husband said "Sandra, you really crossed
the wrong stripper." I felt the will-power to work slip.

5

The workers rushed into the gothic, the logic flowing
like togas or lava. Some felt pain. Some felt Vesuvius.
In *The Classroom of Henricus de Allemania*
At the University of Bologna, note the sleeping student
at the lower right. Or does he weep? And why are his
fingers so lady-like? Is he really a woman? Does my
friend know I want to hold him? Iceland approves
crowdsourced constitution. To explain, preach
and dispute. We rearrange the mind in downward flight.

6

I have nothing to say to you.
I am a professor of some kind. I am a worker
of some kind. I am a mother of some kind.
I cannot see you. I am in debt. I can see you.
I am teaching a humanities course of some kind.
I want very badly to talk to you. I am in debt.
I am writing this for you but even the language
between us is a critique of such mental pyrotechnics.
I want my professorial chair! I want to dazzle you
with my technique! I am in debt.

7

I want to feel this longing for you but
I am tired. Speak directly to the saint.
The dream Dante has of the eagle that swoops
his little body from the Middle Ages and places it
into a burnt-out Best Buy. Love inside the slow,
steady decline of the torqued empire, our abstractions
intensified. To be totally oriented to “the next life” or
to think of your eyes which seemed so shaken
when I saw you last. I thought you had written this poem
for me and for a moment I felt so very alive, later found

8

out it was. Then, turned off the pop
song. For her. On the way back from work bought milk, advised
the dear self not to. I cannot act. The troll said I was old
and ugly. I laughed. The week of visions
rhymed with the work week. *Out of the outfits*
I wore on the red carpet, which one looks best?
The workers walked into the City of Ladies to buy
bags of chestnuts and figs and it snowed.
Shopkeepers, brides, prostitutes and peasant
women. My daughter is twelve pounds.
This is the diary of a minor poet, a “mom” living

9

at the beginning of the 21st century.

We—the workers and also my lover and my husband
as well as the man who rejected me, pulled back

the curtain to find a wall. Then I wasn't so sure I was being
rejected. My lover texted me "we need to talk,"

I ran ten miles, cooked a vegetarian lasagna for my husband,
bought a pirate costume for my son.

"The Indian ocean is in Chicago," my son said.
If I don't correct him, I am a bad mom, bad sister,
bad daughter, bad philosopher-king.

10

If Plath had had a Malibu beach house,
she wouldn't have killed herself.

I will walk through the double doors of the century
with all of the other workers. Red rover,

Red Rover. We hold one another.

And on the page representing February, the farm workers
are warming themselves inside the cottage and the sheep
huddle together outside, but the thing the viewer most
identifies with is the girl with steamy breath on the far right,
stumbling back through the snow
and the frozen village in the far distance.

Golden House

Let's walk to eat breakfast today
I don't feel like cooking
do you
You know what I'm talking
about that place on
Broadway of course
A real greasy spoon
where they keep filling your
coffee over and over and
over again
I always color mine with
half and half because I love
the creaminess and because
it's free and because
it makes me feel at home
Though we're not at
home
explicitly
But the feeling of
is much different than the
existence in don't you think
It is fun to watch the trains
Sometimes in reflection
Sometimes not
And I believe it might rain
today
You say the light is bad so
we probably won't be able
to take pictures but
I think the light

is the light
and there is something
luminous happening
I want to dress up
for you
like a doll and play
house
and we can play with
each other or just stare
at each other's feet
Sometimes I like to dress up
like a girl you tell me
the makeup is awful
and sticks to things
And now things are bright
And the yellow runs so sweetly

Thinner Than Air

A jack-knife moon ivories
the summer night. Young enough
to believe nothing would change us,

we threw our clothes in the air
& watched them fall like used gauze
onto the grass. Our skin disappeared

into the pool the way silence enters
a body to calcify as time. There must
have been a violin somewhere

in the trees. The notes brightening
as we forgot them. You dove under &,
coming back, said *I think I am very close*

to being happy. I don't know why
I pointed to your chest. As if
something thinner than air

could be held in a place not even light
touches. You once told me
the monarch's migration still curves

around a mountain flattened
over two centuries ago. It's August
again. I keep you inside me

because you're nowhere else.

In the note you left you said *I'm sorry*

I couldn't find it . . . But how do we find anything

with only one fluttering heart?

Somewhere, over the Andes, a whole
generation of monarchs will perish

swerving a few miles to the left.

I don't know the way to heaven

but I keep filling my mouth with dirt.

Mountain Diet

To have long hair and walk down the mountain.
Been praying three times a day.

I was a postulant singing, sometimes plowing.
Nothing changed.

I was a singing novice, turning my head around
to try and breathe it in.

As break working the fields, which the others
didn't like. Mainly, I asked.

I asked for a shorter sleeve. So I became a traveler
and a knapsack.

A cup of strong brew, I was talking fields. Between
sips, I was talking

kneeling, the lowered head, mountain diet.
Ending field. Quite

deserted this place, said my guardian, a seer, loyal
and strict. As companion

he talked medicine roots, rows of tough leaves.
The sitting still. Sometimes

a field for a line of song. The woman in apron
and tray, listening

asked to follow us back. Her planted grimace
a life, as mother

to him. He who waits on steps. He waits
on bright hills.

Poem Excluding Landfills

The ground prays at night. You empty moonlight over something like the cosmos of Detroit. Everyone's drunk on the spring version, on the rented rooms in the heart of a thrown away lover. In the background, shame spreads. It moves quickly into the valleys and waterways. Our souls regroup in a situational swimsuit within a Portuguese sonnet. By morning some rugged teenagers have filled the last existing telephone booth with stale bubblegum.

Poem Excluding Shower Scene

The entire world is room temperature. Sunlight bleeds over the winter city, and the mallwalkers gather to form a sort of nervous system or fatigue performance, we say. Consumers storm the sale racks. It sounds more and more like music through pregnant skin. And today every child is born into whatever space is available. We wait for snowfall to interrupt our habits, wait before showing the occasional leg.

from The Invention of Monsters / A Performance in One Act

[scene]

A bathtub overflows into the dream. A bed is always empty with me in it. I locate my hands down river. My hands are piano music. I live inside a photograph of myself with a bloody lip. I live inside a boy and we live together out of context. I am knives wrapped in yellow hair. I am building a ghost out of a body.

[scene]

At this point, the actors lift up their cut-off genitals. Some things are better said in public. Clouds above, clouds below. I think, and then the fear comes back. It's difficult to describe a forest. Are the children still dreaming? I wear my father's mouth because mine got messed up. It's something for the audience to laugh at. A horse rides another horse.

[scene]

This is the scene in which I try on the head of John the Baptist. I find love in the mouth of a bat. For hours the empty chair stares back at me. This is the opposite of finding a voice. This is the opposite of “anything could happen.” A clown cries at the moon and a police officer laughs for the same reason. What does a bat love? My head is the room in which my parents are always dying but never dead.

Stage Coaches

Cowboy bones command the throng.
One falls off his hobby horse.
Some miss marks.

The sheriff stage-whispers cues
from a casting couch,
Hands up. Drop your drawers.

Unstellar heroine in the dark
—cut to black,
nothing but crickets.

The other day,
it occurred to me
while “going down”
on my wife,
it might appear
from certain perspectives
I’m getting ready
to stand on my head
between her legs

My mind laughed
into her vagina
and I wondered
what became of the echo
of my thoughts
and why, years after
turning pro,
my tongue still
gets lost sometimes
while trying to find
its way home

I bought a stethoscope
to listen to leaves breathe
or cough, to the ground, the continents
grinding their teeth, I slip
into my wife's favorite dress
and eavesdrop on its neckline,
I want to know what it's like
to be a woman, to my erection,
the pulse of desire, funny
salute of my crotch, not ha ha
funny but why go to all that bother
funny, evolution, god, whoever
did this, it whispers,
that's all, even though it looks
like the embodiment of a shout

Shrugging It Off

I'm a horrible flower, pansy, lily, any
and all of that color, that rising
green from dirt I don't do
as well as vacuum or screw-
up and buy an aluminum anode rod
for the hot water heater when everyone
not a flower knows magnesium
is better, I am a sensate creature
who poops to Heidegger and defines himself
in terms of defining himself and everything
else, such as you, mailbox, are a mouth
less and less essential
to the masquerade ball and you, Bob,
are irrationally sad about this
and all other diminishments, spiritual
or material, like the mountain
getting shorter every minute
and the hawk, the dead hawk
the vultures interrogated
a good three hours yesterday, until all
of their questions were answered
and the field was still warm
and a pretty shade of red
where I touched the beaten-down grass
and thinking
of Jesus, told it to rise
and get back to work

One Foot Forward, Two Feet in the Wrong Shoes

Just a little going forward
stands in for a ton of feeling
the weather doesn't like me
or paintings turn around
when I come into the room—if only a lean
in the direction of the UN
and peace or one foot closer
to a Tuesday night and applause
for Debussy by people who would otherwise
be loading dishwashers—
though when I advance on the frog
by the pond, it shuts up
just when I want it to tell me
who it has a crush on—I learn
from this and love crickets
at a distance and kill a mouse
and leave it on my wife's pillow
while she's sleeping so she knows
I love her, then immediately
leave for Tibet to atone
for my tiny murder—there must be
an easier way to be alive
than being alive—I would ask
a perpetual motion machine
but they're very busy and the time
has come to admit this, rude

Long, Long Ago I Used to Smoke in Bed

I lived in the basement of an old Victorian,
in a converted coal room with a single bed
built into the wall. I owned nothing, nothing,
and I liked it that way. Well, not absolutely
nothing. I'd picked up a chair somewhere
along the way. Red velour, an over-soft
swaybacked thing with a matching ottoman.
Along the way, also, a cardboard box
full of tangled costume jewelry. Fake topaz,
tourmaline, zircon the color of a white rabbit's
eyes. A choker strung with clanking mock emeralds.
I was beautiful, yes I was. Not so much beautiful
to the world. I was too short and round for that,
my ankles too thick, like a peasant's. Working class
teeth. Working class hand-me-down bras.
But beautiful to myself, yes, yes, and to some,
striking enough to be desired. I hennaed my hair
the color of that wicked chair. My jewels shone.
What else is there to say? Did I work? When I read,
did I read closely? I know I transcribed tapes
for a local author. Tapes of his interviews
with a serial killer, conducted at the state penitentiary
in Jackson. For hours at a time, that killer whispered
in my ear, droning on about his gruesome misdeeds
like a mosquito or a husband. I forgot to say
I'd discovered Rimbaud by then. His jaundiced
point of view had ruined me. Every flower, every tree,
every stone was inked purple by his stinking, ornate
arrogance. I sat in the chair and smoked. The chair
swallowed me, and I smoked. I lay flat on my back
in that cold bed and smoked. Sometimes long-haired
girls brought their boyfriends to visit and we shared

that old Michigan combo, beer with a chaser
of peppermint schnapps. It offers a certain kind
of drunkenness that verges on hallucination,
forlorn and mentholated. I wanted nothing
to do with liqueurs, amaretto washing sentimental
over my blue veins, or some warm-hearted poet's
warm-hearted poems. I didn't even know
there was such a thing as a warm-hearted poem.
I only knew that bitchy boy's poems, Arthur Rimbaud.
It wasn't the drunk boys who wanted me.
It was the girls. It wasn't my body they were drawn to,
but my life, the weird underworld I had going for me,
the basement's hissing pipes and mute, mutant
crickets, the bed in the wall, the red throne
attended to by rats and flying squirrels. The shimmer
of the serial killer's stories, which entered
through my ear and exited, at times, from my lips.
The boyfriends got mad, not at their girls but at me,
for I'd glutted the carburetor of the engine that kept
the world spinning in their direction. I always ended up
kicking them both out, the girl clawing at the tattered
edge of the black slip I wore for clothes, trying to force
her way back into my orbit. Did I say that house
was topped by a glass cupola? And a ghost.
Some lovelorn rich girl pressing her face to the glass
waiting for the return of her fiancé, a lout, an opera
singer, a tenor. You know he was a tenor. I could hear
her up there, pacing the widow's walk in her red velvet
slippers. I'd lay there smoking menthols. Salems,
a brand born the same year I was, named after
that town out east where jackasses burned witches.
My bed was cold back then, and I was cold in it.

It Seems, Back Then, There Was a Mythic Teapot

A napkin holder shaped like a garden gate with painted trumpet vines. The old couple whose goodness was unassailable. They slapped their knees when they laughed at our antics, which were really not that funny. Chewing graham crackers into the shapes of guns. The old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Riddle.

Their drab mouths, their teeth in a jar, their dishes and glassware the color of the amber that traps mosquitos. Their house edged in yellow gladiolas I called flower pokers. My father's tumors bloomed like thought balloons in cartoons but inside them was only a sigh. My mother set her hair on fire leaning over a lit

cake and it seems her hair was on fire for many days. Or was that the lady with the red bouffant whose big thighs shook when she walked up the sidewalk toward the place called Beauty, where she got her hair piled and pinned. The mice in our house were tame, willingly incorporating themselves into our games. Tail hanging out

of the dollhouse window. A wasp hid in my underpants and stung my biscuit. My mother called it my biscuit. My father said that's the way of wasps or he thought it and I read it in the big white moonflower that hung above him, attached by a green umbilical cord. He'd walk to work every day, thin suit, boot polish hair.

Hope was a vinegar-colored halo that formed around our heads. It came and went, like fighting and fireflies. From the schoolyard, I could see my mother holding a basket of wet laundry with clothespins in her mouth. It was strange to watch my own dresses and blouses swaying on the line. As if I'd been skinned alive.

Percussion in the Valley of Dry Bones

The Lord set me in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones.
I will open your graves and declare important things, He said.

The Lord grabbed two hills and broke the crust of the earth.
I will make various pronouncements on your heads, He said.

The Lord mused, rubbing the chin of his golden countenance.
My people will sing unto me, and I will tap my feet in time.

The Lord unpeeled some stratosphere and rolled a cigarette.
Afterward, I would like a very nice reception with limoncello.

The Lord passed his hand over the bones; they began to drop
a syncopated beat. *I will dangle the skeletons of men from strings*

while playing Beastie Boys songs on keytar. The Lord breathed,
and fog and strobe lights issued from each skull. *I will break-dance*

for my people. I will pop and lock with glory. The Lord gyrated
on his chariot, and it did thunder and lightning; the firmament

hissed with steam. *My people will pay one hundred and fifty bucks
to see me lowered onto a stage wearing nothing but pink sequins*

and fingerless gloves, received into a throng of dancers. The Lord
grew indecipherable. He beat-boxed for twenty minutes straight,

and the heavenly host did twist and shake. *I will perform my final
number with pyrotechnics and with smoke.* The sky grew dark,

a great yawning in the abyss. The skeletons hummed. The Lord
flicked ash into the sea, and when I opened my mouth to speak,

he stuck his lit cigarette therein. It seared my tongue. And then
I returned to Jerusalem, no wiser, but blind and full of music.

from Cassavetes

Casting Director

He did his lines and they didn't catch me. What can I say? I told him, *No one would believe you're a murderer.* John left and came back hours later with a pistol. He pointed at him, shaking it, jabbing it toward me. *You don't believe I can be a murderer? You don't think I can kill you? I'll show you!* He wasn't smiling. I was so terrified I started shaking, bawling into my hands. I thought he was gonna shoot me.

Roman Polanski

John wants to improvise, move around. I tell him no. But I like John, he just doesn't feel comfortable. He's not a problem all the time, but when he's uncomfortable in his character, he has problems—when we try to dress him up. He likes wearing sneakers. Just sneakers. You take away his sneakers, he has problems with his acting. We all know he took the part to pay for his own films. That's OK. He's an artist, this wasn't exactly art. We had words because he wanted everything he touched to be art. This I got as close to art as I could, but John never thought it was close enough.

Seymour Cassel

1

John liked to dig into the marrow of time and let scenes happen. He liked long takes. We would work through the scene from beginning to end. Then we'd go back and do it again. I would lose count of takes. I mean, in every film I acted in or worked on, we'd shoot and shoot and shoot until the scenes became these actual moments. When I watch films today there are too many cuts spilling out. Try this: Watch a typical Hollywood film. Like at a desk or a table. Every time there is a cut. Slap the desk. This works better with more people. Get your friends. Get a classroom. We don't notice the editing. Editing is made to be invisible. But try this. I bet you there'll be more cuts than you could've imagined. John had so many good takes to choose from and his edits became more about moving inward. John committed all of the crimes against Hollywood. When there was a cut it wasn't invisible. It was there. It was necessary it tied itself the rawed scene. He made pictures that were hard to watch, but as you couldn't look away. I'm biased, but come on. Watch anyone. The pacing is human. The characters are people. The cuts are never about style. One time I asked John, *Can you just cut in here and let me start from the next line?* He just looked at me. Just looked. That look he gives Mia in *Rosemary's Baby*. He didn't say anything for a long time. The crew was quiet. John slowly walked up to, but didn't speak. I said, *No, no, you're right let's start again. I want to do it again, from the beginning.* He kept staring. Everyone moved back to where the scene began. He walked away from me. Sat behind a couch and said, *What are we waiting for? Let's go.*

Commentary in my ex-girlfriend's room, i watch the vhs, coasted through the film, half awake—my friend said, *you haven't seen this?* he drove home during his lunch break, dug through his boxes & brought it back. he shoved it into my chest, said, *watch this. tonight.* i really pay attention when they start yelling, the kids chasing the violence, the camera chasing the action, the rack-focus, their faces unblurring & blurring & slipping back out of focus. godammit what is that camera doing? later, i would tell my camera operator to watch this, i would shove the dvd into his bag, say, *watch this. tonight.* & on set, i would say, *do it like cassavetes.* i would tell the actor to move, to do their thing, i would tug the operator by his belt loop, watching the monitor, waiting for the camera to *cassavetes*, moving back, away, into, away, behind the columns, & the camera lens fluctuated then, & the lens flared, & we'd do it again.

2

John's drunk, but playing sober. He got good and tight back at the house after the kids were in bed and we were talking about one of his new scripts. And in the lobby at the theater, Kael's standing there, no Paulettes, holding a soda and a box of popcorn. John gives me that look—*fuck this*. But I lead us over. We play polite and find seats in the middle. John gets a soda, chugs half of it in the entrance. In his seat, he fills it back up with whatever whiskey he's got in his flask. He keeps offering me some, but I'm toasted, sweating a little, but feeling level. Kael shoves handfuls of popcorn into her mouth, sips at her soda. She keeps looking over at John during the film. Gaging his reaction, probably. John leans over to me and whispers, *Bet you your jacket she'll pan this one—it's actually good*. I won't take that bet. In the cab, later, on our way to some bar where apparently *everybody* is, John and Kael get into it. It started as us trying to discuss the film and disintegrated into John yelling and Kael pontificating about the intellectualisms ruining the pictures. She goes, *It was flat out awful*. John goes, *Pauline, you don't know what you're talking about. You don't get it*. Kael keeps going. John turns and rolls his window down, then bends down and reaches toward the dark floor of the cab, and quickly yanks Kael's shoes off. He tosses them out the window. At the bar, she walks around barefoot, insulting the film and its makers. John is really drunk, but he's playing it off clowning, leaning on everyone praising the party, sort of swaying his hips to the jukebox, and he starts talking about his next project. Someone asks Kael why's she's not wearing shoes. She says, *Tonight, I just didn't need them*.

Commentary new yorker critic pauline kael constantly attacked intellectualism in film, panned *the exorcist*, *dirty harry*, *west side story*, *the sound of music*, *blow up*, *2001*, *badlands*, *clockwork orange*, *harold & maude*, & all the rest of kubrick's work & she hated cassavetes. but he didn't want her praise, said, *the way i figure it*, *if pauline kael ever liked one of my movies, i'd give up*—& cassavetes wasn't an intellectual, he wanted to make films about people & he wanted his films to feel like that, look like that, no 3-point lighting, no make-up, no stars, & when directors of photography tried to make his films look too good, he'd disrupt them or fire them or ruin shots.

Basic Offer

I can't stop watching them build the new stoplight.
Backhoes and snow banks. Indifferent traffic. Is this
here? Sigh? Saying: *all I want to get is love*
right for once. Well, join the club. Fog over
the parking garage. A body wants to slide down
a corner. I want to build a song that feels like staring
into a campfire set up in an empty can of green beans
on the lip of a canyon.

The only thing you can do with your own devices
is be left to them. For example, I don't trust guitar players
in bandanas. I decide I need a light closer and the top of
my new Freecycle lamp looks like a WWI helmet and no,
it wasn't too heavy to carry past the snowplow dealership
and stripmall gym and Chinese restaurant good for planning
murders in and different Chinese restaurant (buffet)
with a Christmas light strategy that renders irrelevant
real Christmas and the tubular blue palm tree in the window
of the Apple Vay Cays travel agency whose customers
exist (wtf?) and the barber weeping as she gives
herself a back massage. By the time I get the lamp
home the snow has pinecones in it, and they've dis-
mounted and hollowed out every stoplight in town,
so you can canoe in them down all the intestine-
shaped rivers. And even though my lamp's wiring
commits harakiri and my kitchen carpet wins
the Flame Retainment talent show, the last thing
I think of is Osip Mandelstam saying that happiness
is a golden hula hoop guided by someone else,
and I get that feeling I get when I can't help but ram

into a rhetorical confirmation request made by one stranger of another stranger—*But I thought like, oh great, you know?*—with the yes that keeps watch over and under my breath.

Turn Right at the Bridge You Make by Lying There

Because your eyes are not special
when it comes to shaking,

it's a safe bet to blame ghosts
on infrasound.

Where you move to have a kid
is where your kid will be from.

The real life basis of the biopic is flattered
when the actor visits to perfect his impression.

The teenager greets strangers the way he learned
from the non-player characters.

You know your town is special inside
its very own Presidential library.

The page with the lyrics you searched for
starts to play a different song.

Don't worry so much about the news
mispronouncing your name.

When you should be worried is when
you know something without asking.

Of all the weather, snow is the one
that least believes in the world.

Lover

8-bit lonesome my pipeline self clear

until you score enough points to feel the way I feel like all the time.

I am anti-smitten hereafter.

I stamp my muscle tissue into parchment to better document these fetishes.

The name of this book will be

What You Are Doing to Me

no

What Is Becoming of Me

no

the cover of the book

will just be a picture of wolves.

And you'll say

Why is this book's title just a picture of wolves?

I hate wolves.

I'll say

tell me more

about what you hate.

Don't Tread On Me

My desirous eon. My sidearm gravitational slouch. My crushing nebulosity
under which there may be no true soil upon which to tread. My steady. Big personality.

When they made fun of my weight in junior high, I was supposed to have lost
it by now to show them. O, that isn't what happened. Welcome

to my failed narrative. I talk about this baby shit all the time. Thus speak lovers.
I really do want a baby. I really am ready.

This is my country of ingénue consciousness
splayed out drunk, wood paneled, empty cups and bottles, spider webs

on the downstairs bathroom's shower products. You do look cute,
however. My new pantheon: dear.

Dear nation: when the thudding aggression of sex gets taken away from me, I cry like a
baby. I stenciled our names into the dust behind the bed. I lick'd my finger: pandemic.

The new cultural revolution is a singularity. The gauntlet is to erase history
every single day. Big vitriol licks the globs of water in the shower that came off you.

I did drink my single yard until garbage sailed it 'cross the snow, 'cross the heather,
out of orbit.

How can we travel into space when we have not yet augured ourselves
to make space to pour excess industrial runoff?

O park faced outskirts out-of-business kiss. I am low to the ground so kiss me.
Dear nation: You. You did this to me.

You are glamorous when you're horny. You are horny when you're sad.
When you're sad it's nearly too late.

It's too late. I do bite. I do get death stares. I will get dirty because of my solidarity.
I am dirty

because
I am dirty.

[when the fields catch fire]

a truck
rounding the turn
found me,
kneeling with a
kneecap on each
yellow line
& I said,
I can't live right
anywhere but the middle
of this damn road,
but when the fields
catch fire,
I am moved to dust.
no pilgrims,
no songwriters
at my heels.
the truck turned
off its lights
& rested beside me
in the crumbled road.
I wondered if
a human could
settle here.

727 Miller Avenue

In your devotion to tiny facts you're a bit pathetic.
For instance what is the point of knowing
that your great-aunt Louise lived in her last years
at 727 Miller Avenue? There is no point.
She had to live somewhere, she had to have an address—
it could have been 1416 Wharton Street or 94 Walnut
with equal intrinsic meaningfulness i.e. none.
Louise lived a while at 727 Miller Avenue—

what can you do with the information,
will you one day drive past 727 Miller and say
“There, my great-aunt Louise lived there in Apartment 309”?
If you said that there would be only a momentary
hesitation or ripple in the outflow of oblivion
through the air outflow through the air of oblivion
and no other available result.

Do you remember Louise?
Gentleness—white hair—

on your birthday there would be
five dollars and a scrupulously legible note
encouraging you to have fun and to learn interesting things;
a note that must have been written in Apartment 309.

Summer, 1988

Outside the doorway, cicada scream.
Persistent voices in the telephone wires.

What does a sister look like?

In my dream, the birch tree is still
alive, green seeds ready to crumble
into little doll's soup.

The woodshed is piled high;
look out the window, see
the salt lick, frog pond.

A buck sighted, velvet on his antlers, itching—
the twitch of skin where a deer fly lands.

*We have the same freckle—
here*

I draw the water from the pump—
bronze handle leaves a smell on my skin.

The water always follows the same path,
curving down the slope of the driveway
toward the apple tree, drowning the ant hills.
Their black bodies float.

In the mirror, I expect something different.

Swing set where we posed,
matching sailor suits and perms.
Me, watching you, mimicking your stance.

Disease takes the birch tree and
I wonder if we did it—always peeling
away the skin.

Cradle

There's the ark
in miniature.

There's the vacant
nest in the basement.

Honey-colored limbs,
a fine skeleton. Pine.

The elephant and giraffe
plucked out their eyes.

A monkey gutted
himself of clouds.

Turtles fail to circulate,
battery acid caked
beneath their shells.

The stillness and
the stillness.

The pink blanket
in its plastic wrap.

Scent of honeysuckle
and dust.

Let the egg-filled spiders
have their way

and the night cover you.

Spoon

Dimpled by an egg
whose weight vanished

Where a cloud
once rested its head

Cradle of the absent
eye, silver socket

Whose astonishing smoothness
is a torture and an ache

Who services your hunger
but remains nameless

Molten memory curls
along the spine

A furless girl
without arms

She throws back
her hollow head

Flashes the length
of her singular leg

Clutches her thimble
of milk

What is taken
cannot be returned

Her feverish face dissolving
at the bottom of a pool

You reach for her first
thing in the morning

You reach for her
when you cannot sleep

Lulled by her soft
ovals and bells

Ms. Joy Dash

Ever thought of being in the movies?

Well in Texas your beauty is worth diamonds.

You won't even need to kiss anyone.

Susie Q, you need to get yourself a marine. But guess what—

all the marines are at the Navy Pier,
you're in the psych ward.

and honey

They like to keep the pretty girls here

and we're the last ones left, Susie Q.

Do you like dolphins?

Otters?

Do you wear a string bikini?

Groundhogs?

Well in South Padre you can rescue them

or not, and then head to the tiki bar.

I fight like a rich person:

I cause riots,
which keeps everyone from being raped.

THEY'RE NOT GETTING DIALYSIS WHEN THEY NEED IT

and you know

cell phones are the number one cause of rape.

But there aren't any rapes in Maui.

LISTEN SUSIE Q!

I'm pregnant

I spent fifty two days having my first daughter.

so I took a huge mallet

and bit by a brown recluse spider.

I was ready to do it again,

and knocked down all the walls in my house.

And then we didn't have heat.

Runaway Selection

Something that gives an evolutionary edge
exaggerates: moose antlers; the peacock's
shimmery fan-tail; the large-for-our-species'-size
male human *thing*. "If codgers who whistle
their 's'es get enough (and the right
kind of) sympathy, eventually all old men
will sound like hurricanes." So states
the speaker, anyway—a willowy transvestite
with a tangerine fur coat and matching furred
Drum major's hat. The furred Drum major
plans to switch to Business. Anyway, his parents
plan that; take it from Momma and me.

I have pictures from before the fur grew in:
quarter-back of the school team, his shoulders
glittering, parking meter change no sweat for him!
(Change makes me weep; I'm always older.)
"Drag queens will render women obsolete,"
the speaker states. The exaggerated wiggle
and falsetto will lead, through runaway selection,
to "real bazooms and working wombs."

Could our son stop saying, "I'm a homowner,"
when he rents? Could he be a married ex-man
with hardening kids and screeching arteries?
I have my doubts. I have my dreams
in which I skate arm-in-arm with my first love,
trying to recall her name. A bus-sized,
helium-filled pit bull floats overhead: God-like,
down to the very scowl and spiked collar
the Deuteronomy Blood-Guzzler wore the day

Ba'al's priest stabbed Him on a bet. (He *did* bleed pomegranate wine!) But before the priest collected one red shekel, the Technicolor world went black-and-white. God dropped the stick He was chasing, and collapsed. Three times He tried to rise; disciples held Him down. "Imbeciles, it's a flesh wound," He barked as they slammed shut His tomb. Color returned in a few years, though everybody's face was green. Back then, people lived for centuries. Momma and I lack that luxury.

from Only Jesus Could Icefish in Summer

48

been barfing green kneelers since the two doves proved
that wire ain't worth an all day sit
day is church night is a hell if
i am a helicopter goat
am eating my spinner
serious about waiting
like scissors
the surgeons forgot in
if i bend just right you can hear the shearers
singing to ewes how impossibly sad it is
transport equals moving lives?
what are we to think
that they just got up and did the same every day
no think fantastical mountains
and that dewy river
moving morning lazy
through a flood plain
where the gators
cranky on too saltless a water plashing
are loving or eating the frogs why else move?

51

we want the dog
for scarp sense
built blind debt deaf no hot
alphabetical nose
no the largeness mind
testifies to a
beguiled world
and that
not being able to
sense it
all we do is brood about it
want the dog
because straightness
is a guarantee every so
often of corners
off corners
is that a shadow
of a body closer closing
or leak of smoke
in the basement boys
washed in opium
o the dog solves
the meat a little time ago
the meats of their smoked up eyes glassed
as milk held on spoons spells
the cob ceiling you can
grab at that web but
down'll come the paint and old

tremble bunny morning me
hairs sleep
neck back to sleep
like good little campers
under a protean why
good boy

54

you and only you
ware damaged is for free
all you have to do is haul it away
these days there are men
probably three by two
twangs of unsettled waistbands
that ringworm's a rare itch man
waiting on your everything
take it unsorted no problems
o though so holier soar
i want to
on the undigested tin of colanders into
the solar far roar just as
quiet as stone is there remains mud
in the gut of that thing world's quietest
instance of digestion them worms burn
past the local won't let rider ride horizon
razors all
hangers on
the black heat of beyond
ear hole of a star
makes you wanna slap a donkey
favorite favor down
saccharine we engineer
time sweet time
ain't got back again

First Date

1

Mucus lake, membrane horizon

Holding hands, our fingers make
a basket for a beer can

Watch the surface quiver grey

2

Post-nasal dripping

I'm sorry I just
I'm congested

Do you want me to spit first or

3

Only one of us sleeps

Snoring like
choking on throat:

Something we have in common

A Suit Meets a Free Spirit

after Kubrick & Seidel

On a Sunday afternoon what could be more pleasant
than talking about ourselves untying
the straps of yes & no, fabric on flesh
hard & warm enough to say
"I'm just too happy to see you."

To be entirely honest I believe in nothing
I do.
But I do believe in you.
I imagine there is rhyme to how
you dress: lace from middle to chest,
cotton on feet & something man-made
to cover-up your face; I would say
there is no need to, but I am just slipping into a suit.

Slipping into life is a way of saying being lucky,
or a kind of naïve love, or as we know
an accidental, but intentional poem metaphor
fuck. The kind of fuck a body in a suit

apologizes for while getting up;
but the free spirit pulls them back down
taking off their suit to keep them around,
while bodies learn to snap into place at a pace
they measure in nails digging across
the back & unnoticeable bra snaps.

On a Sunday afternoon I am in a suit thinking of you,
& with each breath I am dying, letting the greenbacks
slowly rain into some other Free Spirit's lap. The spirit
of your eyes chains me even now; I am bound
in my chain suit, ready to go underground.

Phantom Anthem

I'll know my country
when I seize it—

like Columbus on the way
to someplace else—

and set my foot
upon its cloud.

O how solemn a business
is the relentless pursuit

of happiness as if it were
a fugitive from the law.

Now its flag is a teacup on an anvil;
now, a grasshopper on a field of stars.

But when I see the adorable children
of celebrities on play-dates,

my joy is irrefutable—
only my denim is distressed.

And when I witness
how tenderly old and young

cradle their guns
and speak in the shadow

of ancient words like freedom.
Well, it never fails to bring a tear.

Something's Coming

First Xmas, you gave me
Einstein's theory of relativity,
soap on a rope, *West Side Story*.

I gave you a bottle of Stolichnaya
which you hated the taste of
(preferring the cheaper brand, Dimitri)
but drank it anyway
and it did make me happy.

In fact, the next day
a neighbor who helped us
dig my car out from under
a snowdrift said he'd never seen
two people so happy
to go to Burger King.

Serial Seeing

A totality
claims to be,
but really—

how could it
contain everything?

Gaps
let the work
breathe,

let the reader
in among.

When art is
too complete,

you're locked outside

(a cold business)

with nothing left
to do but admire.

Stationary Yet Adrift

Like a ship in a bottle
of moonlight. It's late.
The rain has stopped. Walking home
pleasantly buzzed.
Led by the nose through moist,
deciduous halls.
Led by the noise—yellow clang—
midnight sun of ginkgos
yellowing the street.
Literally turning it to gold.
The cars and pavement awash
in fan-shaped leaves.

Canto for Pasadena

Carved in the heart of a valley
I close my eyes to the dissipating asphalt
And imagine a river running south

Sinking in a sea of syllables
We seek refuge on tree palmed streets

At the mouth of the arroyo seco
A roar of rockets
Shaping a vision from earth to space
The dream of Pasadena to orbit the earth
To witness the topography from on high

Like the archangel San Gabriel
Floating above this place

The clouds shifting atop a peak
Standing in a valley of blue, we gaze up
Shaded by the songs of jacaranda and pepper trees
Brick and stone
The bougainvillea vines winding through cracks

There is a calmness here
The hum of the highway
And the ancient river sound

If you open your eyes just right
The midday sun will show you the desert
Will reveal the oasis surrounding you

If you close your eyes and levy your body towards earth
You will hear the ocean, understand the ancient plant life
Feel its presence like coral reef

The hummingbird drinks from the bottlebrush
And floats in space like a countryless man
Finds its route on an earthen byway
And understands migration's song

We are not like the hummingbird
Fixated on our odd constructions
Unable to recognize root from leaf

But somehow this valley sustains us
No matter how we've worked for erasure
The river gurgles in laughter
And every street sprouts something new
Life unstopped by borders
Concrete or otherwise

Hide and Seek

Death, now where's the skinny stray that's already killed a finch and a robin? She's littered feathers like petals in the yard. For three days, she followed us to the bus stop, but she vanished when I prepared a box. Did you know I planned to drive that cozy box to the shelter? Did you know I told my kids, *There's a chance this cat will find a home?* I know truth is precarious. And here you've sent a curtain of rain for the cat to hide behind. In winter, I imagined, she would starve and freeze. In summer, she watches with you.

P.S., Death

Lucy just handed me a crumpled page—crayoned numbers orbiting Venus and Mars. The first grade finished their unit on space and started infinity. Our frail neighbor died today, the one who used to watch her swim. Are you chilly up there in your ratty robe and slippers? Lucy would offer you crackers and juice, then lead you to the monkey bars. You'd have fun. But I don't want you to feel at home here.

Dear Death,

can't you see we're busy riding bikes in the sun? Later we'll cut out paper hearts and sprinkle them with glitter. I have had enough of you. I'd rather learn facts about penguins: what they eat, how much they weigh, how they stay warm in the Antarctic. Some are called Emperor. Some, Rockhopper. First-graders with gap-toothed smiles hold out the class guinea pig for me to pet. Let's pretend you forget all about us.

My Name Is *Far Away*: Interior

The gloom sleets a hazard sign hue. We slip. It is not fair. It is only half fair, palms and waste. It doesn't care if you used the word *desperate* or *desperation*. It just wants to boss you around, push your face down into the blue pillows, not pillows, but bruises, the kind make you feel analogous, a flash behind the eyes. I poke one of the lashes on the skin of bed and hear something shudder from far away. My name is *far away*, my real name. It is moving on.

The Nature of Anguish Is Translated Into Different Forms

The wind slows. Soon, this Northern city
will be just another aisle, stacks of ketchup and racks

of white blouses within spitting distance. Mountains
sit around and let whatever happens happen. Great betrayers:

they sacrificed glaciers to cars. And the trees: don't get me started.
They invite you in, put out a flat stump for sitting, and then pulse

with a silence that's creepy as greeters with smiley faces
or the idea that words could cause a nice day.

Pick up some milk, pay the plastic fee, slide a card,
and get your chores done. I'm pouring concrete into many holes,

letting it dry, trying to finish before the first hard freeze, steel poles
sticking straight up like dull spears. That pile of boards? Call it a fence.

What Happens in 1918 Stays in 1918

I know the end is nigh because we've finished naming things: all the domains are spoken for.

My students say "nothing new" because they read it. I tell them to recycle.

Jealousy can sometimes feel like arthritis. I feel it in my hands when they make things.

Here is a girl whose headband creations can only be described as "Oriental."

Here is a boy who growls experimentally forward on his restored Indian.

Here is a couple in the commons sharing a reheated Red Baron pizza.

Here is a group doing a shadow play: the Carpathia sinking into paper waves.

They make finger puppets, cute and gruesome: the Romanov family, shot.

Claude Debussy, dead on his piano. Wilfred Owen, dead on my birthday.

Guillaume Apollinaire leading a charge of zombie Spanish flu victims.

I dreamed my students reintroduced sex to the public sphere, hung it from giant chandeliers.

They stood by my bed night after night, commenting candidly about the facets.

Their cinematic eyes never strayed far. I was wearing a hobble skirt.

They wore the most amazing pants, the pants of a privileged people.

Precociousness was a train wreck. I showed them D.W. Griffith.

I served round after round of White Russians. They got drunk and named me Alexandra.

In the Future No One Gets to Cry

& there will be a ho-down at the polis.

& you & I will go there in our old boots.

& the music will be ho-hum.

& we will hold hands how we do.

& I will have a mouth like a not unhappy hyphen.

& it will never snow.

& you & I will drink only the beer we brought.

& all the chickens will be loosed upon the world.

& we will watch the great wagon wheel turn.

& we will let our charred chicken cool on the plate.

& the beer will grow warm and why bother.

& the caller will say change partners.

& we will, without protest.

contributors



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Brad Johnson has published four chapbooks of poetry. His first full-length collection, *The Happiness Theory* is due out from Main Street Rag Press in the fall of 2013. Work of his has also been accepted by *Atlanta Review*, *Nimrod*, *Permafrost*, *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and others.

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Corey Zeller is the author of *Man vs. Sky* (YesYes Books, 2013) and *You and Other Pieces* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, forthcoming in 2015). His work has appeared in *Puerto del Sol*, *Mid-American Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The Colorado Review*, and *Diagram*.



NEW POEMS BY

Hadara Bar-Nadav, Susanna Childress, Donald Dunbar,
Elaine Equi, Arielle Greenberg, Mark Halliday, Bob Hicok,
Karyna McGlynn, Nate Pritts, Mary Ruefle, Matthew Shenoda,
Sandra Simonds, Abraham Smith, Diane Suess,
Gale Marie Thompson, G.C. Waldrep, Joshua Marie Wilkinson,
Nicole Wilson, Russ Woods, Joshua Young, & many more.

Columbia

C O L L E G E C H I C A G O

COVER ART: FOUND PHOTOS BY GILLIAN MCCAIN